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AUTHOR Harlin, Rebecca P.
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ABSTRACT

This newsletter highlights the development of reflection and teaching skills in preservice teachers via peer coaching. Peer coaching in preservice programs can serve as an induction program, while with experienced teachers it can serve as professional development. Research suggests that peer coaching contributes to the development of effective teachers. Preservice peer coaching can occur in two ways--either coaching by experts or reciprocal coaching. In reciprocal coaching, two student teachers are randomly paired in their field setting and take turns coaching and being coached. Peer coaching can also be conducted during the earlier stages of the professional development course sequence by emphasizing one set of strategies and incorporating peer coaching experiences designed on a smaller scale. The context for the teaching and coaching episodes is usually limited to individual children or small groups. One school of education's experience showed that learning reciprocal peer coaching during the course successfully promoted student teachers' reflection, improved their questioning techniques, and enhanced their enthusiasm and attention to students. It afforded them an opportunity to match their behaviors to the desired behaviors and to receive non-evaluative feedback as needed. They also developed communication skills for giving and receiving feedback. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Developing Reflection and Teaching Through Peer Coaching

Rebecca P. Harlin

2000

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Fall 2000 • Vol. 1, No. 1

Focus on Teacher Education

A Quarterly Newsletter for the Education Community

Theme

This newsletter serves as a forum for teacher educators' research, insights, advice, and commentary. *Focus on Teacher Education* is intended to disseminate best practices for professional courses and experiences at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. Our mission is to improve the preparation and continued development of our next generation of teachers in schools and university settings.

We welcome the participation and perspectives of the following professionals:

- Classroom teachers serving as supervisors of preservice teachers or mentors of inservice teachers
- Classroom teachers conducting action research within their schools
- Administrators engaged in school-university partnerships and collaborations to improve teaching effectiveness at the preservice and inservice levels
- University supervisors of field work and student teaching
- Education professors who work with students at the bachelor's, master's, or doctoral levels.

We hope you enjoy this inaugural issue of *Focus on Teacher Education*.

—Rebecca P. Harlin, Editor

Developing Reflection and Teaching Through Peer Coaching

Rebecca P. Harlin, Associate Professor, Florida International University, Miami, FL

"I have also been involved in peer coaching. These observations and conferences were valuable to me as to what not to do as well as what to do. Whether a lesson went well or not, it was a learning experience for both presenter and coach."

– Lois, a junior majoring in elementary education

As education professors, one of our goals is to educate teachers, like Lois, who are reflective, collegial practitioners. We allocate a considerable proportion of time in our preservice methods courses to new strategies and approaches to literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies instruction. Yet, how often do we provide our undergraduates with planned opportunities to develop the

interpersonal communication skills needed to work with other professionals? Where is the time to see how peers teach, handle discipline, or manage the classroom? How will our students develop as colleagues, rather than competitors? When we examine the qualities that will enable our novice teachers to succeed in the profession, their ability to interact with peers is as essential as their knowledge base.

Schools are communities where members must support and interact with one another for a common purpose—educating children. In their field schools, our preservice teachers try new strategies and evaluate their effectiveness with children. We rely on the field placement teachers to guide our undergraduates toward recognizing the trouble spots in their lessons and finding ways to improve their teaching. When we are fortunate to have master teachers capable of mentoring novices, this context works well. The preservice teachers receive accurate feedback and appropriate suggestions. When the mentor teachers lack the professional knowledge, time, or motivation, however, the system fails to function as intended (Bendixon-Noe, 1998). Without the expert teachers' feedback, our novice teachers must rely on self-evaluation to gauge their successes or failures. By default, the preservice teacher is expected to employ multiple metacognitive processes to identify reasons for success, locate sources of problems, and employ fix-up strategies. This can be *the* "sink or swim" experience that discourages novices from continuing in the profession. It is our responsibility as teacher educators to seek viable, research-based solutions to preservice teacher development.

Benefits of Peer Coaching

Attempts to improve preservice teacher preparation include earlier field experiences, emphasis on reflective teaching, and recruitment of master teachers to serve as models and mentors. One overlooked and infrequently used tool is peer coaching as a means of developing collegial relationships as well as providing relevant, timely, and specific feedback to the novice teacher.

Peer coaching in beginning teacher programs can serve as an induction program, while with experienced teachers it can be a means of professional development (Showers, 1984; Sparks & Bruder, 1987). For experienced teachers, peer coaching facilitates the incorporation of teaching approaches associated with implementing new curricula (Kent, 1985). Results show that peer-coached teachers practice their new skills and strategies more frequently than their colleagues who work solo. In addition, the peer-coached teachers apply the new strategies more appropriately than the solo teachers. Finally, peer coached teachers retain the new strategies longer than their counterparts (Showers & Joyce, 1996). Thus, peer coaching enhances curriculum reform and benefits inservice teachers' learning.

Within the last decade, peer coaching has been incorporated at the preservice level in the semesters prior to student teaching as a means of strengthening preservice teachers' teaching repertoire (Kromrey & Wynn, 1999; Morgan, Gustafson, Hudson, & Salzberg, 1992), building collegial relationships (McAllister & Neubert, 1995), providing alternative models of teaching (Anderson, Caswell, & Hayes, 1994), developing the language specificity for observing and discussing teaching behaviors (Harlin, 2000; Hendrickson, Sroka, & Gable, 1988), and increasing self-reflection (Wilkes, 1988). Longitudinal peer coaching studies of cohorts across several semesters reported promising results, such as higher satisfaction with field placements and student teaching, more collegial support, and increased levels of professional growth (Bendixon-Noe, 1998; Kromrey & Wynn, 1999).

Much of the literature suggests that peer coaching contributes to the development of effective teachers. One frequently cited advantage is that teachers tried to pursue more risk-taking behavior (Heller, 1989). Another common advantage is the mutual support and nonthreatening feedback, which enable individuals to refine their teaching practices (Hendrickson et al., 1988; Stroble & Lenz, 1990). Third, the peer coaching experience enables weaker, less effective teachers to emulate their peers' more appropriate teaching behaviors while decreasing their ineffective practices (Morgan et al., 1992).

Peer Coaching Models for Preservice Teachers

At the preservice level, peer coaching can be conducted in two ways—either coaching by experts or reciprocal coaching (Ackland, 1991). In field placements, veteran teachers coach novice teachers, share their technical expertise, and provide specific suggestions to those just entering the profession. Veteran teachers engaged in expert coaching are usually selected for their demonstrated knowledge in a content area, as well as their own teaching effectiveness (Bendixon-Noe, 1999; Harlin, 2000). In reciprocal coaching, on the other hand, two novices/teachers are randomly paired in their field setting and take turns coaching and being coached (Anderson et al., 1994). Reciprocal peer coaching not only reduces the level of isolation in many field experience settings, but also builds communities of teachers as learners (Kromrey & Wynn, 1999). Reciprocal coaching encourages a sense of professionalism in novice teachers (Bendixon-Noe, 1999; Harlin, 2000). Thus, the two basic coaching forms differ both in how the coaching is done and by whom.

Most peer coaching episodes described in the research literature involve peers' observing formal lessons presented to a whole class or a group of students. To be successful in this context, peer coaches have to keep track of several variables at once, maintain accurate records of teacher and students' behaviors, and deliver information in an understandable way. This requires a high level of sophistication in data collection and conferencing skills. Peer coaching episodes of this nature are usually found at the end of the students' program or in student teaching.

Reciprocal Peer Coaching on a Small Scale

Peer coaching also can be conducted during the earlier stages of the professional course sequence by focusing on one set of strategies and incorporating peer coaching experiences designed on a smaller scale. The context for the teaching and coaching episodes is usually limited to individual children or a small group. First, the professor in the methods class selects and models the effective teaching behaviors or strategies. Components of effective teaching behavior for that content area are specified. When the strategy is intended for an individual or a group of children, the logistics and sequence are highlighted. This set of strategies becomes the focus of the peer coaching episodes. In my primary literacy course, the strategy focus and the coaching context were identified. I decided to focus on an essential component of the literacy curriculum—teachers' interactive story reading behaviors with children—and to have each reciprocal peer coaching team read to the same child across all coaching episodes. My two goals were to use peer coaching to increase the preservice teachers' repertoire of interactive story reading strategies and to develop clear models of effective feedback about teaching and learning.

In preparation, students completed assigned reading of articles and chapters on lap-reading and interactive story reading strategies. A parent-child demonstration of lap-reading in class, followed by videotaped parent-child bedtime story reading episodes, helped students match what they had read about to what they observed. During subsequent class discussions of the components included in each episode, students compared the accuracy of their observations and the language used to describe the interactive strategies.

Next, each student conducted and analyzed observations of preschool teachers sharing books with their classes at the university's early childhood center. Their analyses of the teachers' techniques were shared and compared in class with peers who observed the same teachers and episodes. This second set of observations, data collection, and analyses served to improve students' familiarity with, and recognition of, each interactive book strategy, as well as their ability to collect and analyze data accurately.

Then, students received training in reciprocal peer coaching—how it works and why it would be beneficial for them. To guarantee access for each student, all of the peer coaching episodes and conferences were scheduled during class time. The students were randomly paired—to avoid friends working together, and to attempt to form professional, rather than personal, teams for reciprocal peer coaching. Recording forms for coaches and teacher/presenters were introduced (see Figures 1 and 2 for format). Students learned non-evaluative

ways to collect data during observations, such as tallying, scripting questions and answers, and time sampling. Coaches and presenters learned how to converse about teaching and learning. Opportunities for both coach and presenter to reflect on the reading episode prior to post-conferencing were highlighted and emphasized. The purposes and structure for the pre-observation and post-observation conferences were explained.

Each coaching episode would have three phases: a pre-observation conference, a read-aloud episode where observations were recorded, and a post-observation conference. For logistical purposes, my class meetings were held at the university's child care center where my students had access to young children. This was a summer school session with two three-hour class meetings scheduled per week. I divided my class in half—one half met with me for a regular class session/lecture while the other half conducted their peer coaching episodes. Then, the two groups switched places. For six class sessions, each peer coaching dyad was allotted one hour; most completed their work within this period. Each student had three opportunities to be presenter/reader and three to be coach. All completed coaching and presenter forms were submitted at the following class meeting.

COACH/OBSERVER: Sunnie DATE: 5/22 CHILD: Megan
PRESENTER/READER Judi
BOOK SHARED: Lavries, Bianca. (1992). Monarch Butterflies, Mysterious Travelers.

PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE:

1. What were you able to suggest for the planned emphasis with the book to be shared? What questions did you pose with regard to the focus?

My suggestions were to use the illustrations as a back-up for difficult content and to concentrate on the information about caterpillars to build on Megan's prior knowledge. I asked questions to see what Judi wanted me to concentrate on.

2. What do you understand that your peer wishes you to target during the observation?

Whether Judi scaffolds the reading of the text in a way that Megan can understand the information the book has to offer. I am to tally how often Megan looks confused and how often Judi says the word "Okay."

OBSERVATION:

3. What was helpful to you about observing your peer's interaction strategies during this lap-reading episode? How can this be applied to your future lessons?

It was helpful to hear Judi use expressive voice and the reactions she got from Megan by doing this. I plan on using her voice model when it is my turn to read next week.

4. What did you notice about the child's responses to the book before, during, and after the reading episode?

Before the reading, Megan was excited about Judi reading to her. She wanted to know when we were going to plant the butterfly garden. During the reading, Megan was interactive during the parts where Judi referred to illustrations. At other times, when the content was more difficult, Megan looked confused. After the book, she wanted Judi to read her another one.

POST-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE:

5. What advice did you give your peer?

The advice I gave Judi was to ask more questions about the book after reading and to encourage Megan to ask questions during the reading.

Figure 1

Professional Outcomes of Peer Coaching

At the end of the course, the results showed that my first goal—increasing preservice teachers' repertoire of interactive story reading strategies—was met. As you can see in Judi's presenter's log, she could identify and describe the strategies she employed. Through reflection, Judi recognized effective and ineffective teaching behaviors. The preservice teachers improved their questioning techniques, references to illustrations, use of metanarration, and level of enthusiasm and expression. Like Judi, by altering the pace of the reading, the preservice teachers' reading episodes became more effective. In addition, they became more attentive to the child's cues and levels of interest and began to use these to their advantage.

PRESENTER/READER: Judi DATE: 5/22 CHILD: Megan
COACH/OBSERVER: Sunnie
BOOK SHARED: Lavries, Bianca. (1992). Monarch Butterflies, Mysterious Travelers.

PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE:

1. What, specifically, do you want your coach to observe about this lap-reading episode?

I want her to observe whether or not I scaffold enough for Megan to understand and stay interested in the book. I also want her to observe how many times I say "Okay" during my interaction with Megan while reading to her.

2. What questions or suggestions did your coach ask in reference to your planned emphasis with this book? Which ones do you plan to adopt?

Point out pictures when possible as examples of hard-to-understand words. Make sure I discuss the caterpillars in the book. (I will adopt both suggestions.)

3. How will observational data be collected by your coach?

The "okay's" will be tallied on a data sheet. When Megan appears to be confused, a separate tally column will be used.

OBSERVATION:

4. What concerned you about the reading episode as you presented it?

I was most concerned about holding Megan's attention, because she is easily distracted.

5. What went especially well?

When I commented on the pictures and pointed out examples from them, Megan seemed to really enjoy looking and listening.

POST-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE:

6. What were the most important comments from your coach?

My "okay's" were few and used appropriately. When I did read words that were above Megan's comprehension, she did become confused and distracted.

7. What did you learn from this peer coaching session that will help you with your future lap-reading sessions (for example, behaviors to maintain/increase/decrease)?

I learned that my tone of voice during the reading had a big impact as far as keeping Megan's attention, and that was when Megan was most interactive—when I used a lot of expression and when I discussed how the pictures related to the written words.

Figure 2

Finally, the preservice teachers became more astute in selecting and evaluating the appropriateness of books for their particular child.

In the pre-observation conference, the presenters learned to specify the type of feedback and data collection they need from each episode. Likewise, the coaches clarified their understanding of the presenters' expectations. As Sunnie's coaching log shows, the coaches also reviewed with presenters their plans for the book and offered suggestions or alternatives if a problem was detected. During the lap-reading episodes, coaches collected the observation data in the agreed-upon format. In post-conference, the coaches learned to deliver feedback based on their observations and to recommend alternative teaching behaviors or strategies to improve in subsequent lessons. When listening to the coaches' feedback, the presenters learned to question and seek elaboration or explanation in a professional way. Thus, the second goal—providing effective feedback about teaching and learning—was also met.

In this limited context, reciprocal peer coaching afforded preservice teachers an opportunity to match their behaviors to the desired ones and to receive non-evaluative feedback as they needed. Moreover, these novices developed the communication skills to give and receive feedback that is specific, timely, and helpful to their individual colleagues. As shown in this small-scale example, peer coaching episodes can be tailored to the course content and knowledge base of preservice programs. This fall, why don't you give it a try?

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The Ezra Jack Keats/ de Grummond Collection Children's Literature Research Fellowship Program

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From the Vice President

integrating the internet into the curriculum

Realistically, today's teacher candidates will need to be continuously immersed in technology in order to remain on the cutting edge of technological advances for their students. How can that be possible? The pool of tomorrow's teachers includes not only teacher candidates, but also their cooperating teachers for student teaching experiences and their college methodology and content professors. This powerful group of educators can work together to infuse technology into the curriculum, thus providing rich opportunities that may enhance learning for our children.

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania has implemented a project that continuously immerses teachers in technology. It is know as The Technology Infusion in Teacher Education Model, and is implemented by Audiovisual Communications Technology (AVCT) faculty and led by David Peterson. During the spring and summer 2000 semesters, teacher candidates and their instructors were collegially involved in a variety of instructional and professional development activities. AVCT faculty served as technology collaborators/facilitators for triads of workshop participants consisting of professional education faculty, inservice teachers, and teacher candidates.

One group in the summer course included a 3rd-grade teacher and a children's literature/reading professor. One of the teacher candidates, Kevin, had completed two undergraduate courses related to audiovisual communication technology. The inservice teacher and college professor, by contrast, despite their many years of teaching experience, had no significant formal training in the use of such technology. Their goal was to develop a product that would involve 9-year-old students in the process of using the Internet as a resource to supplement their science/social studies curriculum. As a result of working together, both the inservice teacher and college professor increased their knowledge of technology, and the teacher candidate increased his knowledge of pedagogy. No one member of the group had all the answers; consequently, each member of the group felt successful.

How can 9-year-olds use the Internet effectively during school hours when their school is in the beginning stages of hardware acquisition? To help define parameters for Web site searches in group projects, Kevin's team compiled a Web Walk-about. They related it to a future study unit on marsupials, and tied it in to the Olympic Games in Sydney, which would be underway when the school year began. The group used a software program called Adobe PageMill to compose "Web Walkabout: Koala Lou, Where are you?" State and national standards for technology education and reading and writing provided additional focal points. The group described the walkabout in lesson plan format and provided demonstrations via a Power Point presentation.

The Web Walkabout might be introduced with a shared reading of *Koala Lou*, written by Mem Fox. Then the students would be given backpack journals that they take to their computer workstations. There, they will learn the process of using the Internet to gain information about marsupials by completing the walkabout. They can answer questions given on the walkabout microcomputer screen by clicking on links to Web sites. Kevin's group decided that hyper-links to Web sites would be more developmentally appropriate for 9-year-olds at this time than the long URLs, or Web site addresses. After students become adept at visiting sites, they can learn how to discover additional sites within curricular guidelines, with appropriate supervision. Once they complete their walkabouts, they will transfer that information into their journals. Finally, they will give short reports as part of a classroom group.

The potential power inherent within this collaboration is clear. Technology changes rapidly, always making way for further advances. Taking a class or two is not enough to promote technology integration into the curriculum. Being on the cutting edge of the learning curve in the use of technology within the curriculum means that teachers need to immerse themselves in technology so that they will be able to provide appropriate learning opportunities for their students.

Readers may gain more information by contacting David Peterson, Dept. Chair AVCT, Kutztown University of PA, 19530; E-mail: peterson@kutztown.edu; or visiting www.kutztown.edu/acad/coe/avct/projects/infusion/workshops2000/index.htm.

Please share your comments, questions, and ideas about integrating the Internet into the curriculum with me at burnett@kutztown.edu. I look forward to hearing from you and will try to follow up on your suggestions.

—Jeanie Burnett, Vice President Representing Intermediate/Middle Childhood

Call for Manuscripts

The readership of *Focus on Teacher Education* is encouraged to submit manuscripts for publication that focus on the preparation of teachers.

Articles may describe best practices for professional education courses, field work, mentoring, action research, school-university partnerships, etc.

Prospective authors wanting to discuss ideas and suggestions for manuscripts should contact the *Focus on Teacher Education* Editor:

Rebecca Harlin
16325 Golf Club Road, #311
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33326

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